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DEPARTMENT FOR DAS BRYZA AND EUR/CARC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/30/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: BOKERIA HARDLINE ON ELECTIONS AND ABKHAZIA

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) In a May 28 meeting with Ambassador, Deputy Foreign Minister (and key Saakashvili insider) Giga Bokeria sounded a hard line on elections and Abkhazia. On elections, Bokeria attributed the ruling party's overwhelming win to the fact that opposition voters did not vote. He agreed with the importance of bringing the opposition into Parliament, and said that the ruling party would offer concessions to the opposition to give it real power in Parliament. Bokeria indicated that the Government was near the end of its patience with the opposition, saying that anyone who tries to break into Parliament during its first session on June 10 would be arrested. On Abkhazia, Bokeria said that the Government would not support a non-use of force statement absent a return to the status quo ante in Abkhazia and that it would decide after President Saakashvili's meeting with Russian President Medvedev when to demand the withdrawal of the CIS peacekeeping force from Abkhazia. The Ambassador encouraged ruling party efforts to work with the opposition to carve out a responsible role within Parliament. He also noted continuing U.S. efforts to have Russia remove the airborne troops and equipment from Abkhazia and repeal the Putin instructions. End summary.

¶2. (C) In a May 28 meeting with Ambassador, Deputy Foreign Minister (and key Saakashvili insider) Giga Bokeria reviewed the May 21 Parliamentary elections. Bokeria attributed the ruling United National Movement's (UNM) overwhelming win to the fact that opposition voters did not go to the polls. He claimed that the opposition lost 300,000 votes overall from the January 5 Presidential elections, including 50,000 votes in Tbilisi alone. By contrast, he said that the UNM picked up 10,000 votes in Tbilisi. He believed that people had become disillusioned with the opposition and that UNM sponsored polls (conducted by U.S. firm Quinlan, Rosner and Greenberg) bear this out. When asked about Labor Party leader Shalva Natelashvili's loss in his home district of Dusheti, Bokeria said that Natelashvili did not campaign once in his district and the better organized UNM candidate ran on a platform asking voters what Natelashvili had done for them.

¶3. (C) Bokeria, who is also the head of the Inter-Agency Task Force on elections, reviewed the complaints and appeals process, noting that the results from some 31 precincts had already been annulled in response to complaints. (Note: As of May 30, 39 precincts have been annulled. End note.) He said more complaints were moving through the court system and that so far complainants had won 13 cases in the courts. Bokeria said the Government's instructions to the district commissions regarding complaints was to give the benefit of the doubt to the complainant. He noted the Central Election Commission would publish a final result on June 7 or 8. When asked whether the ruling party would reach out to the opposition to try to form the new Parliament, Bokeria said that the ruling party was already offering to lower the threshold for creating a parliamentary faction and to give the opposition a Vice Speaker position as well as Deputy Chair and Chair positions on parliamentary committees. The

Ambassador encouraged these efforts to work with the opposition to so that they could work within the Parliament.

¶4. (C) On Abkhazia, Bokeria said that the Government did not see any positive result coming out of a joint declaration on non-use of force and return of internally displaced persons. He made clear that the President's position is that if the Russians are gone, there is a different security situation and Georgia can discuss such a declaration - but not before. Ambassador said he had passed this message to Washington and would do so again but also noted that the U.S. and others have pressed and will continue to press Russia to remove the airborne troops and equipment added on April 29 as well as to repeal the Putin instructions of April 16. He urged the Georgians to maintain the restraint they have shown so far in the face of Russian provocations. Bokeria said that the Government would at some point request the removal of the CIS peacekeeping force but would wait to see if there was any possibility of progress with Russia on Abkhazia in the meeting Saakashvili would have with Medvedev in early June before deciding on timing.

TEFFT